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SUBJECT: DEMARCHE ON DEMOCRACY IN VENEZUELA

REF: STATE 154674

Classified By: PolMinCouns Scott Bellard, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) In a meeting with PolMinCouns on November 13, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade's South America Division Director Daniel Daley expressed appreciation for reftel views as well as shared concern about negative trends in Venezuela. He cited mid-October talks in Washington between his Director General and Special Coordinator for Venezuela McCarthy as especially useful and timely.

12. (C) Describing Canada's policy on Venezuela as "principled engagement," Daley nonetheless voiced pessimism about positively influencing the outcome of Venezuela's constitutional reform process, while vowing to continue to speak out in concert with other concerned states. He noted that Canada tried to build relationships with "vulnerable" hemispheric states -- notably, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua -- to counter Venezuela's efforts to woo them, backed by its petrodollars. (Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Trade Helen Guergis visited Nicaragua as well as Costa Rica during the week of November 5, in part to balance Prime Minister Stephen Harper's other stops in the hemisphere in July.) He commented that Venezuela's foreign policy was largely unsuccessful, as the elections for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council again demonstrated.

13. (C) Daley noted that Venezuela had not had an Ambassador in Ottawa since mid-2006, although it appeared likely that Venezuela would nominate a candidate soon. He expressed some concern about aggressive outreach efforts by the Venezuelan Consulates General in Toronto and Montreal. Canada has not sent a ministerial-level official to Caracas in more than a year, following a "disastrous" 2006 visit by the Deputy Foreign Minister. Recent senior Venezuelan visitors have included a vice foreign minister, a legislator, and the Ombudsman, none of whom had very successful meetings here, Daley added. He noted that Canadian officials consistently expressed their concern about developments in Venezuela that undercut democracy and civil society, usually highlighting that many Venezuelans were now "voting with their feet," judging from the queues to apply for permanent resident visas at the Canadian Embassy in Caracas. (Venezuelan employees now play a significant role in the oil industry in Alberta province, he noted.) The Venezuelan visitors usually dismissed such people as "enemies of the revolution" or "enemies of the people," according to Daley.

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